

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CONFESSIONAL
CONSIDERED AND CONFUTED.

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF
T W O S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,

In the YEARS 1772 and 1773.

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O X F O R D :

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THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSTITUTION
CONSIDERED AND COMPLETED

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF

Imprimatur,
THO. FOTHERGILL,

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and of the City of Oxford
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Author of the following Discourse desires to add to the Apology which will be found in the introductory part of it, his Inducements to the present Publication, on a subject which many may think sufficiently discussed, from a natural imagination, "that what appears very satisfactory to ourselves, may possibly bring satisfaction to the minds of others;" (as a late famous Author expresses himself;) and from an irresistible wish to notify as much as may be his personal sentiments, and the grounds of his attachment to our Ecclesiastical Constitution.

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THE Author of the following Discourse does
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 found in the introductory part of it, his thanks
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 the reader to notice as much as may be his own
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 our Ecclesiastical Constitution.

1 COR. Ch. I. Part of Ver. 10.

— THAT THERE MAY BE NO DIVISIONS
AMONG YOU.

WITHOUT recurring to the original occasion of these words, it will be sufficient to note, that they indisputably recommend peace and unity among Christians, and forbid all causeless strifes and divisions in the Church. Such divisions as these may, agreeably to the marginal reading, be justly called *Schisms*. And therefore, tho' religious establishments (one of whose principal objects is the conservation of publick order and tranquillity) are by no means sacred, purely as such; yet nothing will warrant an attempt towards an alteration^a, and much

^a That there is nothing in the least exceptionable in our whole ecclesiastical system; nothing that might reasonably be retrenched; nothing that might possibly be altered for the better, even in our Articles, as well as worship, rites, and usages, we by no means affirm. But the author, whose

less a dissolution of them, but an absolute conviction that the glory of God, and the spiritual interest of man, are concerned in the change proposed, or the abolition solicited. All this is in effect acknowledged by the Author of a late notable performance, who with as great a degree of assurance as violence, hath levelled his latitudinarian artillery not barely against a few outworks, but the very foundations of our *Sion*; and, instead of apologizing for his undertaking in such a manner as it's consequence might seem to require, assumes the air, style, and dignity of a *Reformer*; plumes himself upon the supposed visible superiority of his cause; affects to appeal to the candor and common sense of the intelligent Reader; nay, what is infinitely more solemn, refers, indirectly at least, to the dreadful day of universal retribution; and imputes the acquiescence and assent of the Clergy in and to our present systems, or formularies of Faith and Doctrine, to illaudable and iniquitous motives; to something as far short of persuasion or approbation, as the most selfish prin-

ciple I undertake to discuss, cannot avail himself of those concessions which every Church avowedly fallible will readily make; while his scheme is utterly irreconcilable with the nature or notion of any spiritual establishment whatever; unless the want of absolute perfection will pass for an argument against such establishment.

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ciple or prevaricating disposition can be supposed to be. We see then our credit as well as our patience is attacked by this Writer; and we are called upon not unactively to resent, but effectually to reply.

It will not be expected that a short discourse of this kind should contain a formal or particular answer to a work of this nature; but it may help to throw new light upon a most important and delicate subject, which has already exercised much abler pens than mine; and may, I flatter myself, contribute towards the effectual confutation of the misapplied principle on which the performance in question is founded, and consequently to the detection of that Spirit which appears to have actuated it's Author. I shall therefore proceed in my present design without further preamble or apology, and venture to assert, that the main argument of the *Confessional* proves too much, is not unfrequently retortible, and involves itself in inconsistency and self-contradiction.

THE principles of the first Protestants were, according to our Author's account of them, such as these: " Jesus Christ hath by his
" Gospel called all men unto liberty, the glorious liberty of the sons of God, and re-

“ stored them to the privilege of working out
 “ our own salvation by their own understand-
 “ ings and endeavours. For this work of
 “ salvation, sufficient means are afforded in
 “ the Holy Scriptures, without having re-
 “ course to the doctrines and commandments
 “ of men. In these Scriptures all things
 “ needful for spiritual living and man’s soul’s
 “ health, are mentioned and shewed. Con-
 “ sequently, faith and conscience, having no
 “ dependence upon man’s laws, are not to
 “ be compelled by man’s authority ; and none
 “ other hath the Church of *Rome* to shew for
 “ the spiritual dominion she claimeth. The
 “ Church of Christ is congregated by the
 “ Word of God, and not by man’s law ; nor
 “ are the king’s laws any farther to be obey-
 “ ed, than they agree with the law of God.”

LET us abide then by this *general* account
 of the matter, and enquire whether our Re-
 formers can be supposed to have wished or
 designed those consequences or conclusions
 from these principles, which the *Confessionalist*
 and others have drawn from them. The prin-
 ciples above stated admit and imply the exist-
 ence of the Church of Christ. And yet no
 such Church can possibly exist, if the doctrine
 be true which hath been extracted from these
 principles. For what are we to understand
 by

by the term *Church* in the New Testament? The term is unquestionably a complex one, importing sometimes the whole body of Christians, or, if you please, the Elect, wheresoever dispersed over the face of the earth, or the Catholic Church, of which in general Christ is *the Head*, which he is said to *have loved*, and to have *given himself for*; and sometimes denoting a part thereof, or a particular, a national, or provincial Church; as St. Paul addresses one of his Epistles to the *Church of the Thessalonians*; another to the *Church of God which was at Corinth*; and St. John his *Revelation to the seven Churches which were in Asia*. There are in Scripture no other acceptations of the same term, which have any relation to the matter in hand. With respect to both the above acceptations, we find repeated mention made of pastors, teachers, spiritual rulers, or governors; and suitable duties enjoined, resulting from the divine appointment of them. But hath our Author's idea of a Church any thing tolerably correspondent hereunto? According to his notion, the Church of Christ consists of an indefinite number of individuals, avowing one common rule of faith and manners, but each judging and determining for himself, independently of all kind of *authority*, and without the least regard to any Pastor or

Teacher whatsoever ^b. Now if this idea of a Church be evidently unscriptural, the super-

^b The author of the *Confessional*, and his associates, are compelled by truth to counterwork their own system. They frequently, because unavoidably, speak of Church-governors, of the Clergy, and of Christian Pastors and Teachers, as a body of men, whose province it is to direct and instruct others in *the way of salvation*, &c.---But how is the appointment or ordination of these at all more consistent with an absolute and independent right of private judgment, and the indispensable duty of exercising that right, than the establishment of formularies, or the imposition of subscriptions?---And if not, will those who admit the appointment of such Governors, Pastors, and Teachers, be helped out of this difficulty by positively denying, or obliquely disparaging their authority? Rather, can they admit the one without allowing the other, and thereby involving themselves in farther embarrassment? Doth not the relation subsisting between superiors and inferiors, between *him that teacheth and him that is taught*, necessarily import a degree of controul and authority on the part of the former, and of subjection and obedience on the part of the latter? And might not all this be reasonably urged, tho' the Scriptures were wholly silent upon this subject?---Indeed a late Editor of a tract, intituled, *Free Thoughts on the Subject of a farther Reformation*, &c. would fain make us believe they are so; nay, that they not only discountenance, but plainly forbid all spiritual jurisdiction and authority. With this view, among other feeble attempts, he endeavours, in his Remarks on N^o 1. of that Tract, to refer the following text of the Apostle to the *Hebrews*---*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, &c.*---to the case purely of submission to temporal governors; in opposition to the assertion of Dr. Balguy, and the concurrent interpretation of expositors.--Did this text stand single in the present

structure raised upon the just cited principles is much wider than the foundation ; and consequently the great point contended for, the right of private judgment in matters of Religion, was not asserted by our Reformers in the sense of the *Confessionalist*. If these Reformers meant no more than a reformation of the errors and corruptions of the *Roman* Communion, the existence of this national Church, as a body or society professing one common faith, and agreeing in one common mode of worship and discipline, is as much supposed upon *Protestant* as upon *Popish* principles. And if they really meant more than this, why did they not plainly and honestly say so, and act accordingly ?---Surely these original prin-

present debate, it were a very easy matter to invalidate our Editor's title to the sense of it in behalf of his hypothesis ; and to demonstrate the defect of his argument from the passage quoted, in point as well of candour, as of solidity. But for pity's sake, to leave him in quiet possession of it, let us take the liberty only to ask him, whether he does not know a *great number* of texts of the New Testament, which plainly and necessarily refer to *spiritual* authority, and to *nothing else* ? If he knows not any such texts, he is not sufficiently versed in the sacred writings to become a party in this controversy ; and if he knows them, his gross dissimulation unfits him for entering into any controversy at all. In a word, we may defy him to evince the right of private judgment, &c. in his absolutely unlimited sense, without wresting, misapplying, or suppressing Scripture.

ciples of the Reformation are not *naturally* and *necessarily* attended with the consequences that have been deduced from them.---Let us look a little more closely into them.---*Jesus Christ bath by his Gospel called all men unto liberty, the glorious liberty of the sons of God, and restored them to the privilege of working out their own salvation by their own understandings and endeavours.*--- Now I would fain see a single passage pointed out in the Scriptures, wherein the word, *liberty*, is used in the same sense with that which is required by our author's hypothesis ; or indeed in any sense fairly countenancing the same. Then again, it is not easy to conceive how a privilege could be *restored*, which was never *taken away*, because never *enjoyed*. For when, where, or by whom was the right of private judgment exercised according to the tenet of the *Confessional before* the Gospel dispensation ? Whatever privilege therefore Jesus Christ might *bestow*, he certainly *restored* nothing of this sort upon this occasion. Indeed neither did he, we shall see, confer such a privilege as is challenged by this writer. We shall readily agree that men *cannot work out their own salvation but by the use of their own understandings and endeavours*. But what if their own understandings should direct them to apply for instruction to those who *are attending continually upon this very thing ?*

thing? Will they in such case be wanting in their endeavours to *work out their own salvation?*----In these few periods therefore the author of the *Confessional* appears to say and to intend more than our Reformers said or intended.---For this work of *salvation*, continues the account, *sufficient means are afforded in the holy Scriptures, without having recourse to the doctrines and commandments of men.*---True; and accordingly our Church most explicitly avows scriptural authority for every thing she teaches, and scriptural countenance at least for every thing she enjoins; as her ministers in their private capacities preach only what they conceive to be the doctrines of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. I say, conceive to be; because neither the Church nor her Ministers pretend to infallibility, though they may reasonably pretend to be less fallible than the bulk of mankind. At worst, a well-meaning man will stand as fair a chance of being free from error in the Church as out of it. And yet, as if this could not possibly be the case, every man, according to our author's sense of the matter, is under an absolute necessity, an indispensable obligation to judge strictly and solely for himself. Were the first Reformers of this opinion? I presume not.---In these *Scriptures*, as the account proceeds, *all things needful for spiritual living, and man's soul's health,*
are

are mentioned and shewed.---They are so ; but not shewed in so clear a light, or mentioned in so plain a manner, with respect to all cases, situations, and circumstances, as to lie level with every apprehension ; and therefore it is the province of the Ministers of Christ to explain, illustrate, and enforce them.---But let us attend to the consequences drawn, it seems, from the preceding positions.----*Consequently, says our Author, faith and conscience, having no dependence upon man's laws, are not to be compelled by man's authority ; and none other hath the the Church of Rome to shew for the spiritual dominion she claimeth.*---Very true ; but how doth this affect the Church of *England*, who claimeth no spiritual dominion over Christians, or compelleth any man to come into her Communion ? She doth indeed propound her terms of Communion, which as a Church, or a Society, she has a natural right to do ; and which did she not do, she could not exist as a national Church ; that is she could not exist at all ; because, as was observed, the Scriptures will not warrant any notion of a Church, (which hath concern with our argument) but that of the Church universal, or a Church particular or national. The fact is, the Church of *England*, forcing her terms on no man, and *leaving every private person to stand or fall to his own master*, with regard to any particular opinion he may entertain, only
secures

secures her own peace and welfare, or rather, you see, her very existence, by certain orders, rules and constitutions, systems of doctrine, and modes of worship and discipline; which, amidst a multitude of strange and ridiculous tenets and persuasions without her pale, preserves her *at unity in herself*°. Whether our author hath advanced any thing material

° It may be pertinent to remark in this place, that the constitution of the Christian Church, or, if you will, the state of the Christian Religion, is a thing very different now from what it was in the days of the Apostles; or, to explain myself by other words, though essentially one and the same, it neither was nor is circumstantially so, with respect as well to the times preceding, as those subsequent to the dissolution of the Jewish Church and polity by the final destruction of Jerusalem. At this period, and not before, the Mosaic oeconomy totally ceased; and the *middle wall of partition* between Jew and Gentile was effectually *broken down*. All disputes concerning circumcision, and the observance of the law of *Moses*, were hereby happily terminated; and from this time the Christian Church may be said, if I may be indulged the expression, to stand truly and properly upon its own bottom. We see then, the term *Church*, as I have elsewhere said, is a complex term, and exhibits itself to our ideas in different views, and under very different characters. In a general sense, and considered as including, with respect to its own intrinsic virtue, all nations and ages whatever in the grand scheme of redemption by Jesus Christ, *the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world*, it may justly be pronounced to have subsisted from the beginning, and most assuredly will continue to the *end, of all things*. In this light, I presume, we are to understand the Apostle's declaration, that the *Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen*

in disproof of such unity, will appear in the course of the present disquisition; and proceed

heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. And, agreeably, under the patriarchal, Mosaic, and evangelical dispensation, strictly so called, the Church, though differing in point of external polity, has been, is, and ever will be in substance the same. And parallel to this is plainly our Apostle's meaning, when he tells the *Ephesians* they are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, *Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.*---But in a second, and particular sense, the Church is composed of the worshippers of the true God, only in and through his blessed Son Christ Jesus; and consists of many parts or branches, making *one body*, of which he is *the head.*---This is the Christian Church, properly so called, commencing indeed with our Saviour's personal ministry, but not perfectly complete in respect of doctrine, or established as a society, till after his resurrection. We find him accordingly purely laying the foundation of a spiritual constitution, which, in the nature of things, could not but be the subject of future laws, and regulations, of several kinds. For, as a learned commentator observes, our Lord said not unto *Peter*, *On this rock I do*, but, *I will, build my Church*;--- οἰκοδομήσω; --- *and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* In order to the peace and security of this Church as a Spiritual Society, the power of the keys was given to this Apostle, and afterwards conferred, in the very same terms, on all the rest; which cannot be understood to import less than a delegation of some sort of jurisdiction and authority, in matters ecclesiastical, to them and their successors after them. And yet I cannot see that any sort of jurisdiction or authority is reconcileable with the hypothesis of our author. The truth is, they who talk so much, and with such apparent feelings, of the original simplicity of the Gospel, will never be able to prove, that

we meanwhile to observe, that, according to the above representation *only*, Jesus Christ is truly and properly said in Scripture to be the *head of the Church, which is his body*. Agreeably to the same representation, the notion of *schism, division, and heresy*, is extremely natural and obvious: whereas there cannot possibly be any such things consistently with the sense of this writer, relative to the principle under consideration. For if every man is allowed, and indeed commanded to judge and determine for himself in spiritual

that it is absolutely incompatible with all system or establishment; or, that the successors of the Apostles had not, as such, an inherent right to frame decrees and constitutions, relative not to discipline only, but to Doctrine, as revealed by, contained in, and deducible from the Scriptures, as the exigencies of the Church might require. That the Apostles appointed their successors in the Churches they planted, is allowed on all hands: but I would ask, Who, or what authorised them so to do? The nature, and reason of the thing, I apprehend, and no express direction or command of their blessed Master, that we meet with. He gave *some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Prophets and Teachers*; and for purposes which could not be answered but by a regular succession of at least some of these characters; though he did not make explicit provision for such succession, nor establish the Christian with the circumstances and formalities of the Levitical priesthood. Ecclesiastical commissions and ecclesiastical jurisdictions have therefore, in the Church of Christ, the same common foundation. In respect of rites, ceremonies, and the whole external apparatus of Religion, concerning which the Apostles have

affairs, the notion of a Church as a body or society, is absolutely chimerical ; and, by consequence, there will be no *schism*, tho' *Christ* should be *divided* ; there will be no *Herefy* amidst a variety of fundamental errors in religion.---Though therefore it will readily be admitted that, as the concluding period of the paragraph before us asserts, *the Church of Christ is congregated by the Word of God, and not by man's law ; and that the King's laws are no farther to be obeyed, than they agree with the law of God ;* yet where, or by whom hath it been proved, that the king's laws, or the laws re-

have left only a few general rules, this jurisdiction is confessedly discretional ; and the exercise of it will vary with times, and places, and circumstances : but, in respect of doctrine, *other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*, as St. Paul speaks, or, which is faith in Jesus Christ, as the words have been paraphrased. Still however the foundation and the superstructure, though they constitute only one building, are distinct and separate things. And our Apostle's arguing is exactly correspondent hereunto. Now if any man, he adds, *build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones*, that is, sound Christian doctrine, *wood, hay, stubble*, that is, doctrine of a contrary nature, *his work shall be made manifest* upon proper and severe examination. With less authority than I really have, I should conceive myself justified in the application of this passage. Let this application be farther extended to the respective cases of the Church of *Rome*, and the Church of *England* ; and let me just subjoin, that what the foundation is to the superstructure, that are, or ought to be, the Holy Scriptures to Confessions of Faith, or systematical establishments.

pecting

specting Religion, are not agreeable to the law of God; or that human ecclesiastical laws and constitutions may not be framed for peace and good order's sake in a Church originally congregated by the word of God; or that the exercise of every man's private judgment, exclusive of all rules, canons, or systems whatsoever, is like to produce a more consistent, rational, or scriptural scheme of faith and worship, than can be expected from human institutions and establishments, which have avowedly their ground and basis in divine authority? If these things have not been proved, and that to demonstration, we may affirm the author of the *Confessional* either to have mistaken, or to have overstrained the original principles of the Reformation; which, as excellently as they were calculated to "emancipate us from the fetters of Rome," (to use his own words) never meant to assert any liberty or privilege to private Christians to the prejudice, and much less the overthrow of all spiritual jurisdiction and ecclesiastical polity. "That there may be no danger of encroachments upon Christian Liberty rightly stated, (as I have elsewhere remarked) the holy writings are not only indulged, but recommended by our Church Governors to every hand; and in doing this they both own the right, and challenge the examination of private judg-

“ judgment, or human reason ; but then pri-
 “ vate judgment or human reason, as it is the
 “ standing test of these matters, is one thing ;
 “ and the judgment, or reason of every pri-
 “ vate man, another. It was upon rational
 “ principles that this Church was reformed ;
 “ and upon rational principles it was esta-
 “ blished, and must be supported. Our Re-
 “ formers laid the Scriptures open to public
 “ view, that the world in general might see
 “ how grossly they had been imposed upon
 “ even in matters which concerned their eter-
 “ nal salvation ; and that these scriptures
 “ might be a perpetual barrier against the like
 “ abuses and corruptions for the future ; but
 “ all this while they reserved to themselves
 “ the right and liberty of declaring their own
 “ sentiments in their collateral capacity, and
 “ of drawing up and framing confessions and
 “ systems of faith and doctrine as governors or
 “ *overseers* of a Church still in being ; as well
 “ as of making such orders, rules, and con-
 “ stitutions, as they thought requisite for it’s
 “ peace and good government as a spiritual
 “ community,” The laudable and declared
 end of such systems and confessions was to
 prevent, as much as might be, *diversity of opi-*
nions in Religion. I say, as much as might
 be, because in a Protestant Church an abso-
 lute uniformity of sentiment with relation to
 all

all and every doctrine; to all and every mode or form of worship, to all and every the minutest rite or ceremony, cannot possibly be expected or required. “ Upon total appro-
 “ bation, in the strictest sense, I observed
 “ some time since from this place, no claim
 “ can in the nature of the thing be supposed
 “ to be made by a Church whose very foun-
 “ dation lies in a disavowal of infallibility.
 “ Accordingly the declaration of our *unfeign-*
 “ *ed assent and consent to all and every thing*
 “ *contained in the Book of Common Prayer*; our
 “ conformity in general to Church establish-
 “ ments, and *subscription to articles*, must be
 “ understood consistently with this disavowal.”

It is true, the author of the *Confessional* would infer from such want of universal concurrence of sentiment, and from *any* difference of sense, or latitude of interpretation, the impropriety, or rather iniquity of requiring a subscription at all.---But if this be sound reasoning, I must repeat, there can be no such thing as a Church upon earth; because without some common mode of worship and confession, some test of orthodoxy, some standing formulary of doctrine, no Church could possibly subsist. And therefore though the subscribers to such a formulary do not *all* understand *every* article in the same *precise* sense, or though a *particular* article may be understood in a *contrary* sense;

yet the Church may justly be said to be the center of unity still, and the subscription will be rightly and reasonably required, in order to prevent, as far as *human* prudence can prevent, *diversity of opinions*.

AMONG certain maxims "unhappily adopted" by the *Reformers*, in our author's judgment, is the following---"That the true sense of Scripture could be but *one*." But unhappily, for whom was this maxim adopted? For the *Confessionalist*, I apprehend, and his friends and abettors, or for nobody: because if there can be any more than *one* true sense of Scripture, there may be *twenty*; and in this case we have nothing to do but to accommodate ourselves to our own fancies or prepossessions, and amidst an infinity of acceptations and constructions shall all be sound believers, and orthodox Christians alike. The truth is, the difficulty of ascertaining the full and true meaning of particular passages in the sacred writings hath given occasion to a contrariety of interpretation, and by consequence to an opposition of sentiment. But all this while, as the true meaning of any such passage can be but *one*; so neither is this difficulty of ascertainment, or this contrariety of interpretation, so frequent, or so momentous

tous as to disturb the peace of the Church, or prevent a *general* uniformity of opinion.

I AM aware, the author of the *Confessional* is very ready to avail himself of the diversity of sentiment to be found among Churchmen themselves, and, with a view to depreciate subscriptions, to represent it as infinitely more considerable than it really is. Accordingly he would make us believe that “ *no two thinking men ever agreed exactly in their opinion, even with regard to any one article of our thirty-nine.*” --- I shall consider these as his own words, though they are cited from a late eminent prelate, whose view, by the way, in “ offering a plea for liberty and latitude in subscribing the articles,” I take to be of the same complexion with that of our author in his argumentation *against* subscribing them.-- Now on these words I must beg leave to bestow a remark or two, In the first place, it reflects no great honour upon the memory of the compilers of our Articles, to suppose them to have been purposely, or injudiciously drawn up, in such a manner as should justly incur this censure. In the next place, if this assertion be well founded, our author has *opened a great and effectual door* to scepticism. For, I presume, it may be affirmed with equal truth, that *no two thinking men ever agreed exactly*

*exactly in their opinion, even with regard to any one text of Holy Scripture, or indeed any one passage of any other writing whatever. And if so, he hath gained his point with a witness; as the absolute impossibility of agreement must evidently supersede the use or necessity of a Confession. --- But let us remind him, that it will at the same time supersede the very notion of a Christian Church; unless we can suppose such Church to be constituted by a set of unthinking mortals, who without design or reflection have formed themselves into a religious society. --- However the assertion was certainly adopted to serve a purpose, which, I imagine, a little enquiry will discover to us. --- We have hinted at such a purpose already. --- Of all our articles, the *seventeenth* is most capable of contrary construction; and accordingly hath been, and is subscribed no doubt by different persons in different senses. I do not know that this contrariety hath been attended with any consequences prejudicial to the interest of Religion in general; though the *Confessionalist* hath indeed extorted a consequence that shakes its very fundamentals. For he maintains that the same door which lets in *Arminians* at the *seventeenth* article admits *Arians* at the *first*. With what truth or consistency he maintains this, it will be necessary to enquire. Let us refer then to the first article.*

article.---“ There is but one living and true
 “ God, everlasting, without body, parts, or
 “ passions ; of infinite power, wisdom, and
 “ goodness ; the maker and preserver of all
 “ things both visible and invisible : and in
 “ unity of this godhead there be three per-
 “ sons, of one substance, power, and eternity ;
 “ the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”
 Now, I presume, he who subscribes this ar-
 ticle must be supposed to believe the existence
 of three persons in one divine nature ; and if
 so, he doth most undeniably believe the Doc-
 trine of the blessed Trinity, though he may
 not be able to fix a *special and determinate*
 sense upon the *particular terms* of the article,
 such as *person, substance, eternity, &c.* and
 though abstracted propositions respecting *these*
terms may be capable of *different senses*. And
 yet this inability and this capableness are ur-
 ged with a degree of triumph by the author of
 the *Confessional*. Verbal janglings are endless.
 Admit but *his* mode of reasoning, and the
 same difficulties will clog the first and leading
 clause of the article before us ; to which ex-
 clusively I take it for granted he hath no ex-
 ception. For who shall fix a *special or deter-*
minate sense on the words *everlasting, without*
body, parts, or passions, &c. or lay down pro-
 positions relative to *them*, that shall not be
 capable of *different senses* ? In short, the Con-

Confessionalist's principle of argumentation will destroy all notion of agreement even in regard to the first point of faith, the existence and attributes of the Deity ; and so we are left not only without a Church, but without Religion too. For if, according to his plain intimation, we are to disbelieve the Doctrine of the Trinity on account of the *unspecial* or *undeterminate* sense of the terms under which it is expressed, &c. we ought, I apprehend, to disbelieve the existence and properties of one God for the same reason.---And now, doth the *first* article of our Church fairly and naturally admit the same latitude or qualification, which has been claimed for the propositions concerning *predestination* in the *seventeenth* ? That article concludes thus : “ Furthermore, “ we must receive God’s promises in such “ wise as they be generally set forth to us in “ Holy Scripture. And in our doings, that “ will of God is to be followed, which we “ have expressly declared to us in the Word “ of God.”--- As “ positive as the *Calvinists* may be for the *special* and *determinate* sense” of the article in question, the *Confessionalist* hath granted in effect that this is a *saving clause* ;-- and that there is something in these expressions which qualifies and abates, in a certain degree at least, the rigour of the foregoing part of it. But is there any thing of this nature ;

ture ; any thing like a *saving clause* in the first article ? A *saving clause*, and a *term*, of which it may be difficult or impossible to fix the *special* and *determinate* sense, are, to my conception, very different things. Consequently the *Arminian* and the *Arian* are by no means upon the same foot ; nor can “ the same latitude be allowed ” to the *faith* of the one, which is left to the *opinion* of the other ^d. In a word ;

^d The thirty-nine articles confessedly contain at large the doctrine of the Church of *England*.---But be it remembered at the same time, that this doctrine admits of the old and well-grounded distinction of points fundamental and not fundamental. Accordingly we by no means subscribe to all the articles as of equal consequence or importance. And therefore a diversity of opinion with regard to points not fundamental, will neither affect the common faith, nor the quiet of the spiritual community. The article of *Christ's descent into hell*, e. g. is capable of more constructions than one ; and hath doubtless been understood, and consequently subscribed, in different senses. And yet, I apprehend, the several subscribers may all be justly said to believe this article. The ambiguity of the term *Hell* supposes a latitude of interpretation ; and if so, of subscription. But how doth this concern those articles in which we shall look in vain for the same ambiguity ? The truth is, we are certainly supposed to subscribe to the articles in general in the sense of the compilers of them ; but when that sense is unknown or ununiform, as in the case of the article before us, we *must* subscribe in our own sense ; and when the compiler's sense is fairly questionable, or is not precise and determinate, as in the case of the seventeenth article, I do not see why we may not take advantage of such want of precision in favour of our private and personal sentiment. At worst, if we cannot

if our author hath any serious apprehensions that the door lies equally open to *Arminian* and *Arian* subscription, they appear to be totally without foundation. But hath he really any apprehensions of this sort? Hath not the tenor of the assertion, that “*no two thinking men ever agreed exactly in their opinion, even with regard to any one article of our thirty-nine,*” an especial aspect towards such of them as are *Trinitarian*? And if so, is it not the aim of the *Confessionalist*, under a pretended zeal for Christian liberty, and Christian privileges, to disencumber himself from what the Church holds, and ever hath held, for Christian Doctrine?

put a sense upon *any* article, though relating to the most immaterial point, contrary to, or differing from that which may reasonably be *supposed* to have been the sense of the compilers, without leaving ourselves liable to a charge of prevarication; with what additional weight will that charge lie against him, who, under the pretence of an allowed general latitude of construction, shall subscribe to the most capital articles in a sense of his own, which he *knows* to be diametrically opposite to that of those compilers?---Upon the whole, this circumstance of the diversity of opinions among subscribers to our articles, might be urged, with a fair shew of reason, as an argument for revival, retrenchment, or limitation of meaning, &c. as cases and exigencies may require; but how it can justly be alledged to prove the expediency, and even the necessity of abolishing subscription, and expunging all articles relative to Christian faith and doctrine, I own I have not penetration enough to discover.

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BUT, it seems, the *Confessionalist* objects to systems of faith and doctrine in general, and to all our articles in the gross, upon this pretence,--that being mere *human explications* of Holy Writ, and expressed in *unscriptural, scholastic, or artificial* terms, they cannot bind the assent and consent of Protestant Christians.--- Now I would willingly know whether our objector admits of any explications of the Scripture of any kind. Because if he doth, such explications must necessarily be human.-- Well--But, it is urged, it is not the thing, but the mode which is complained of. We are not to be told what Scripture Doctrine is, but in Scripture words. That is, the writings of the New Testament are not to be expounded and commented upon as all other writings without exception confessedly are. For, if I mistake not, other words beside those of any author himself, will be found both convenient and necessary for the elucidation of particular passages in his performance. It will be granted indeed that every writer, as well sacred as profane, will be best interpreted by himself; and that his sense will be most surely ascertained by comparing passages with passages in the work under view, and fixing and limiting particular meanings by the general scope and manifest purport of the whole. But, I confess, I know not how all this is to be effected,
if

if the commentator or expounder be not allowed occasionally to make use of terms and expressions of his own.---Let us see whether these remarks will not be warranted by facts. The *providence of God* is not only admitted by the author of the *Confessional*, but considered as one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Religion. And yet upon his own principle it should be no doctrine at all. For he will not find the least mention of the *Providence of God, totidem verbis*, throughout the Old and New Testament. According to his idea, *human providence* will be a doctrine much more demonstrable from the sacred oracles; even granting *Tertullus* the orator to have exceeded the bounds of truth, when he ascribed so much to the *providence of Felix* the Roman governor. So that the doctrine of the *providence of God* must necessarily fall to the ground, unless it be maintained and supported by natural inference, and acknowledged rules of interpretation. --- By the way, therefore, the omission of this doctrine *specifically* in our *creeds* and *articles*, though perhaps not without some little difficulty to be accounted or apologized for, is however most absurdly objected, if not in form, yet in effect, to the Church, by the author of the *Confessional*.--But to proceed. I cannot help looking upon the objection before us as a tacit denial of the Doctrine of the *Trinity* ;

nity; which term not occurring in the Holy Writings, is, I doubt not, ranked among our author's *new, unscriptural, scholastic, or artificial* ones. But then I would recommend it to this *Disputer* to consider by what texts he will undertake to prove the *Unity* of the Divine nature; which, in the sense demanded by his argument, is a term no more to be found in Scripture than the other. The doctrine of the *Trinity* therefore is in no wise shaken by the objection we have under present consideration. The truth is, if this objection hath any real force, we shall be under a necessity of expunging a great part of the *Apostle's Creed*; and even such articles of it as Christians in general, without the least scruple or hesitation, have assented to. For, I desire to know by what *express* and *literal* authority of the Scripture any person believes in the *Holy Catholic Church*, or in the *Communion of Saints*, or that our Saviour was *born of the Virgin Mary*, or *suffered under Pontius Pilate*? &c. Nay, upon the principles of this objector, we shall be under a necessity likewise of maintaining opposite doctrines, and advancing propositions directly contrary to each other; we shall, *e. g.* affirm and believe that *Jesus Christ gave himself a ransom for all*; and that he hath *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; but must at the same time deny that he hath made a full, perfect,

perfect, and sufficient *satisfaction* for the sins of the whole world *." In short, if we are to be absolutely precluded the use, and applica-

* The author of *Free Thoughts, &c.* before mentioned, was either not aware, or not ashamed, of being involved in this very absurdity. Under the article of the *satisfaction of Christ*, which he has extracted from archbishop Cranmer's *Catechism*, he directs his reader, at the bottom of the page, to note, that "the word *satisfaction* never occurs in the New Testament; and that the scholastic or systematic sense, in which divines have commonly applied it, is not to be found there." The archbishop had observed, that if Jesus Christ "had not been very God, he could not have been pure and clean from all sin, and so have made a true a true and perfect satisfaction for our sins." And in saying this, I apprehend, his Grace spoke the sense of the Holy Catholic Church from the earliest period. But if so, the scholastic or systematic sense happens for once to be right: and our author was rather unfortunate in ranking *this* among the extracts produced from his Grace's treatise, to afford "matter of conviction to the judicious, that one of the most learned and best men in *England* was defective in a branch of literature that most concerned him, and was far short of those attainments in biblical knowledge, and the genuine sense of Scripture, of which the present age is so happily possessed." --- In a word, if he who hath given himself a ransom for all; or, if he who hath put away sins by the sacrifice of himself, hath by necessary implication satisfied or made *satisfaction* for sin; if he who hath made this *satisfaction*, must have been absolutely sinless; and if he who is absolutely sinless must be very God; to what purpose doth any man beat the air in this spiritual fight, by taking impotent exceptions at words or terms of evident significancy? Or with what face can any man attempt to elude the force of inferences so irresistible?

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tion of unscriptural words, or terms, in the investigation and exposition of Scripture meaning, it will, I presume, be next to impossible to frame the most simple system of Christian Faith, or formulary of Christian Doctrine whatsoever; and, agreeably hereunto, we find the the author of the *Confessional* and his confederates expressly disavowing and protesting against any system or formulary of religious faith and doctrine beside Holy Scripture itself. But I must take leave to ask, whether this be not talking unintelligibly? I can readily conceive, and do aver, Holy Scripture to be the proper and sole rule or measure, by which a system or formulary ought to be planned and digested; but with what propriety, or in what sense it can itself be called a system or formulary I profess myself entirely at a loss to comprehend^f. In a word, the Church of *England*,

^f I have before now had occasion to remark, that the Holy Scriptures are not a *methodical*-system of divinity. The great truths they contain are occasionally interspersed throughout the whole. We can no more prove, *e. g.* by a single passage, section, chapter, or head of doctrine, that there is but *one living and true God*, than we can demonstrate that in the Unity of this Godhead there be *three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity, &c.* Accordingly, the mode of proof is the same with respect to both clauses of our first article; *viz.* by conjunction and comparison of texts, and just or necessary illation from them. Whether the doctrines of the Being and Attributes of God, and of a Trinity

with equal wisdom, explicitness, and candor, disclaims all jurisdiction over the consciences

Trinity of Persons in the Unity of that Godhead, are equally deducible from the sacred pages, is not the present point of enquiry; it being sufficient to have shewn that neither of these doctrines is proved from or warranted by Scripture, as a *system*, or a *formulary*. Consequently the doctrine of the Trinity is as much a scriptural doctrine, and therefore a true one, as the doctrine of the eternity, ubiquity, or providence of God, for any thing that appears to the contrary from what hath been urged or insinuated, with a manifest view to supersede it, by the circumstance we have just had under consideration. In the mean time, without staying to examine in this place, whether the doctrine of the Trinity hath not been clearly proved from and by Sacred Writ, (which, by the way, in this very circumstance seems to be virtually acknowledged) I would take the liberty to ask the author of the *Confessional*, whether, in general, a very clear, consistent, and rational scheme of Religion may not be drawn from the Holy Scriptures, even admitting them to be in themselves no system or formulary of Faith and Doctrine?---If he should tell us, that such a scheme is not to be extracted from these writings, it will follow that all religious discourses, treatises, and expositions, &c. whatsoever, *as well as* all human constitutions, confessions, and systems of a spiritual kind, are utterly superfluous and insignificant; but if he grants this, he must admit at the same time that *all* these things will become not barely useful and proper, but absolutely necessary: and how this situation of matters is reconcileable with the exercise of private judgment, according to the principle of the *Confessional*, it will be it's author's business to acquaint us. Let me farther observe here, that the Christian Religion was preached some years at least before the Scriptures of the New Testament were written; and that the great truths of this Religion

of men, or, in other words, all right of imposing her doctrines upon them purely *as such*,

gion were gradually opened and displayed, if I may so express myself, by a kind of progressive revelation. It contained not the very same explicit articles before and after our Lord's resurrection.---The apostolical writings, meaning here thereby the four Gospels especially, are to be regarded chiefly in the light of a history, wherein a number of the most important and interesting truths are to be found, the belief of which is necessary to everlasting salvation. Accordingly, as a late writer observes, they are called by *Justin Martyr*, τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀπομνημονεύματα; or, in other words, apostolical memoirs of the life and actions of Jesus Christ; or of all that he did and taught. In short, both these and the Epistles were written, we know, by different hands, at different times, and on different occasions.---From these particulars I infer, that the doctrine of our Saviour, and that of his Apostles after him, orally delivered, and the subsequent Scriptures containing such doctrine, were and are the sole ground or foundation of any rule or canon of Faith.---They are no system, no formal code of Faith and Doctrine, or of Articles of Belief methodically digested; but the only test by which any such code or System is, in all its branches, even the most minute of them, to be deliberately and ultimately tried. From hence then the notion of a Confession or System appears manifestly to originate; and it will not be possible for the Author of the *Confessional* to protest against any system or confession, merely as such. But if not, he must necessarily admit the use and expediency of *some* creed, *some* standard or formulary of faith and doctrine in the Christian Church. And yet, can he admit this without undermining his own fundamental principles? Or, what Scripture *precedent* have we of any creed or formulary of faith whatsoever? The most simple creed that may be imagined must consist of something

when she declares in her sixth article, that
 “ Holy Scripture containeth all things neces-
 “ sary to salvation ; so that whatsoever is not
 “ read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is
 “ not to be required of any man, that it should
 “ be believed as an article of the faith, or be
 “ thought requisite or necessary to salvation.”
 But yet, according to this article, and indeed
 according to common sense, what can be fair-
 ly *proved by Scripture* is as much Christian
 Doctrine as what is literally read *in it*. This
 will be allowed on all hands ; and therefore
 if it hath been, or can be proved by this ir-
 refragable authority, that there are three per-
 sons in one divine essence ; or if the divine
 superintendency over the affairs of this world,
 or the expiation made by the death of Christ
 is evincible from the same ; the question
 doubtless will be, not whether the terms--*Uni-*
ty---Trinity---Providence---and Satisfaction---
 are scriptural or unscriptural ; but, whether
 they are proper or improper, adequate or in-
 adequate, expressive or otherwise ?

thing *unwritten* : something distinct from pure literal Scrip-
 ture ; something which has indeed it's ground in Scripture,
 but is not *totidem verbis* Scripture itself ; whereas, accord-
 ing to the principle of our author, such creed should itself
 be contained in Scripture, and recommended and enforced
 to our belief and attention in and by Scripture. Conse-
 quently, as no such creed or confession is there to be met
 with, the absurdity of the principle is demonstrated.

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BUT let us view this subject in another point of light.---The great principle of the *Confessional* is this;---that every man has a right, and ought to judge for himself in matters of Religion; which was indeed the principle of the *Reformation*. The right of private judgment hath accordingly been and still is acknowledged by the Church of *England*; and the only difficulty will be to reconcile this right with spiritual authority, and the establishment of systems, &c. But let this difficulty be as great as you please, it is enough for us to know that these things are really reconcileable, by demonstrating that the principle before us cannot possibly be true in the sense maintained by this modern adversary.--It is really pleasant to observe the extravagancies into which he is driven by his blind attachment to this principle. A favourite author of his hath, I find, declared, that "*by the Church which hath authority in controversies of faith, he understands not only the aggregate body, but every member of sound judgment in the same; well knowing, as the Confessionalist adds, that every intelligent Christian, with the Scriptures before him, is, upon Protestant principles, and in decrees of this nature, a Church to himself.*" In which few sentences he hath, to my apprehension, effectually confuted some hundred pages of his own performance. For in this passage, you

see, is admitted again the existence of the Church as an *aggregate* body, and also the *authority* of such Church in matters of faith *as well as* that of "every member of *sound judgment* in the same." But we would know how such *authority* is equally compatible with the idea of an *aggregate body* and an *individual*? Or, by what figure any *individual* can be said to be a *society*, or, as it is here emphatically expressed, a *Church to himself*? Or, in what sense such *individual* is to be considered as making *decrees* respecting *controversies of faith*? Or how, according to our author's notion, there can be any such thing as a controversy of faith? --- If all this doth not amount to something more than an impropriety, we may proceed a step farther, and enquire of this great assertor of Christian liberty, what will become of the *unintelligent* Christian all this while? The right of private judgment, and consequently of determining, or *decreeing*, if you will, is claimed by the principle of the *Confessional* for *all* Christians without distinction or exception; it is most explicitly avouched in this very page of that work; whereas the just cited passage, we see, hath vested this privilege, and this authority in such Members of the Church only as are of "sound judgment." *Unintelligent* Christians then, it should seem, are to be turned over to the care of the
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intelligent; or, perhaps, such as these may be permitted to herd among the *unthinking*, and become members of the *aggregate body*, the *Church*. But then, unhappily, in either case, the great right in question will be “*transferred*,” which, at the same time, as our author assures us, it is “*every Christian’s indispensable duty to exercise personally for himself*.” In short, every man ought to judge, determine, and decree for himself, in religious matters, or he ought not. If he ought, what room is there for any distinction of sound and unsound, intelligent and unintelligent? If he ought not, where is the right so earnestly, or rather so vehemently contended for? It is incumbent on our author to reconcile these things.-- Again. He tells us, as hath been seen, that it is “*every man’s duty to search the Scriptures*, and to determine for himself;” and, as he adds, “*if he finds just cause, to dissent from any or all the human establishments upon earth*.” Now, I take it, this period supposes every man capable of *searching the Scriptures*, and determining for himself; and of distinguishing between a *just* and an *unjust* cause of separation, &c. But is this the case in fact? Suppose a person be not able so much as to read the Scriptures. *What shall this man do?* Or, suppose him to be an utterly incompetent judge of them, and that by his own confession.

tion. Will it be his duty to *search the Scriptures*, in order to determine for himself, under a sense of this incapacity? If it will, it will be his duty to neglect all means and opportunities of instruction, and to immerse himself in error with his eyes open. If it will not, he submits his private judgment to the judgment of others, and thereby renounces his Christian privilege.---The truth is, our Author, and other writers of the same stamp, are perpetually embarrassing themselves under the article of personal qualification; and after all their most strenuous struggles and efforts to climb over the pale of the Church, will be found unwarily, or rather inevitably slipping back, as I may say, into her fold, and discovering ecclesiastical principles. I cannot help citing the words of a late famous prelate upon this occasion, in support of my observation. "As it is absurd, says he, to suppose that any man can be saved by the faith of another, or by any belief but what is truly his own; so there is no possible method of having a faith of his own, properly so called, without building it entirely upon what appears right to his own judgment, such as it is, after his best endeavours for INFORMATION."---That is to say, in other words, a man cannot properly be said to judge for *himself* till he has received instruction or information

mation from others. --- But to return to our author.---The paragraph above quoted declares it to be every man's duty to dissent from any or all establishments, provided he finds *just* cause for so doing. This imports the *possibility* at least of an *unjust* cause of dissension, as well as the agreeableness of an establishment to the Word of God. And yet, according to the position of the *Confessional*, as no ecclesiastical establishment can be agreeable to the Word of God, inasmuch as it infringes upon the natural right and just liberty of man; so, let such agreeableness be admitted, and there can be no such thing in nature as an *unjust* cause of separation. For will not *any* cause be a *just* cause to him whose duty it is to judge and determine for himself? --- But to quit this head, and to use some of our author's own words;--- "We will
 "be reasonable. One single passage of the
 "New Testament proving the right of private judgment in matters of Religion independently of all and every notion of pastor
 "and teacher, or of spiritual jurisdiction
 "and authority, will satisfy us. Nay, one
 "single passage from which it may be *clearly*
 "inferred." But till such passage is produced, we shall think ourselves justified in holding this principle---that every man is to judge for himself in matters of Religion---in consistence

with ministerial duty, and the authority of the Church ; nor, as hath been intimated, can we be under the least obligation to fix precisely that consistence, after having shewn it's *reality* by demonstrating the *absolute falshood* of the principle in the sense of the *Confessionalist*.

I HAVE not room to be more particular ; and shall therefore conclude with just noting the complexion observable in the performance we have under consideration.

FREELY as the author of the *Confessional* speaks upon most subjects, for certain reasons he doth not always speak *out*. We have already seen an instance of his disingenuousness ; at least have very strong presumptive proofs of it, in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is no hard matter to guess which of our articles hurt him most. Were there occasion, much more might be produced from the performance to corroborate our present presumption. But if he be neither more nor less than an Anti-trinitarian in his heart, would he not, by *laying the ax to the root* of all establishments and systems of faith whatsoever, artfully rid himself of a doctrine, which he is self-conscious he is much abler to deny, than to disprove ? Doth he not, by seeking to undermine such doctrine by craft, or attacking it in
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a clandestine and indirect manner, discover not barely a want of that frankness and sincerity which distinguish a generous enemy, but the influence of some predominant principle entirely different from the love of truth?---And doth it not become us to be jealous of *such* a Reformer as *this*?--I would just repeat here, that the present question is by no means, whether the Doctrine of the Trinity hath, or hath not, foundation in Scripture, and consequently be true or false. It is sufficient to observe, that our Church at the *Reformation* retained this doctrine as most unquestionably scriptural; and therefore the present attempt against it by our author, who hath not averred, and much less proved the contrary, deserves a harder name than I chuse to bestow upon it.

BUT we have something stronger than the strongest presumption wherewith to support the present charge.---We are given to understand, in the seventh chapter of the *Confessional*, that "some competent observers" have grounds for "more than a suspicion, that the Church of *England* has been, and still is, though by degrees imperceptible to vulgar eyes, *edging* back once more towards Popery." It would be doing too much honour to so stale, and so ridiculous a calumny, to bestow a syllable of serious confutation upon it. Suffice it there-

fore only to *suspect* in our turn (and perhaps it may be thought with much better reason) that the *Confessionalist* and his adherents are *sliding* into infidelity.

AT the end of the third chapter our author complains, that " we are driven to make apologies for, and even to defend, subscription to a confession which many subscribers do not believe."---Now as much as he may avail himself of the indefinite term--*many*---this passage (unless he means only himself and associates) contains at least a most illiberal and ungenerous insinuation. But let us turn to another, and see whether it will not clear up the matter, and be a fair Comment upon that just quoted. We are told then in another place that " there " will be *numbers* among us, who will continue to subscribe, and continue likewise to " *care for none of these things.*" I will readily agree with our Author that if there really are *any* " such as these", they will " care not for matters of more consequence." But I desire to know, by what authority *numbers* are included in so infamous a reproach. Are the Clergy in general liable to this shameful imputation of stupid carelessness, and wicked indifference?---Or, doth our Author discover less malevolence of heart, and less want of candor and charity, when he *changes his posture of attack*, and accounts

counts, as he frequently does, for our zealous adherence to ecclesiastical establishments, from personal and lucrative considerations? ----- But, perhaps this freedom of treatment from the *Confessionalist* will not so much excite our wonder, or provoke our indignation, when we consider that, to serve his purpose, he speaks detractingly even of the venerable fathers of the Christian Church; as to a very great degree, by the way, did one of his friends and allies, of those of the blessed Reformation².

² I mean the late author of *Free Thoughts*, &c.---This gentleman speaks of our first Reformers in the following terms: "One no small disadvantage which they unhappily laboured under, and which from their time to this has been matter of just regret to true friends to Divine Revelation, was their defect of knowledge in sacred matters, above all, in the true sense of Scripture, &c." If we would form our judgment (says he in another place) of the abilities of our Reformers to frame for us a system of doctrines which should remain a perpetual standard of belief and profession in the *English* Church, and by which all our Clergy, in all future ages, should be summarily concluded, we shall, I suppose, see just reason to wish that they had been more equal than they appear to be, to so weighty an undertaking. Those who are well acquainted with their writings will see, in a variety of instances, evident marks of their insufficiency for such a task, and be fully convinced of the truth of that observation of a learned and worthy Doctor of our Church, that they were but *bad interpreters of the Scriptures*." In support of all this derogation, which he hath kindly qualified with a few introductory common place compliments, our author has given us a number of extracts, relative to certain

NEXT to the disingenuoufness of this performance, let me observe a little upon it's incivility. I will only select a few examples.

tain religious topics, from Archbishop *Cranmer's Catechism* above mentioned, published in 1548, and dedicated to king *Edward VI.*---We may see, it seems, from these extracts, how greatly disproportioned the abilities of this famous prelate, and his colleagues, were to the work of reformation; and by consequence how totally incapable they were of drawing up systems of faith, or framing a set of religious articles, that should be a standing rule or measure to all posterity.---To what conclusions this will lead, I need not inform the reader.---But I take leave to offer a remark or two upon the occasion.---In the first place, if the intellectual weakness of our Reformers was really so great as is here represented, we Protestants, to a man, have reason enough to be ashamed of ourselves. What answer shall we make to any sensible Roman Catholick who should tease us with these mortifying truths? Methinks, as none of the exceptionable contents of the passages cited from the Archbishop's Catechism make a part of the doctrine of our Church, they might, in reverence to *his* memory, and for *her* credit, have much better been suppressed. Had our author contented himself with observing that the Reformers of the Church of *England* were mere fallible men, and consequently, that the systems and forms they have delivered down to us may be capable in some instances of amendment and alteration, he had spoken more agreeably to truth, though less adequately to his purpose. For what he has alledged hath a plain tendency to prove the necessity rather of *pulling down* than *repairing* our spiritual building.--On the whole, as he has conducted the matter, I know not any one person upon earth under so many obligations to him as the Pope of *Rome*.

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“ Perhaps, he tells us, our present subscribers are generally, though not universally, of the *Arminian* persuasion. I mean such of them as

I am inclined to believe, this writer and the author of the *Confessional* speak in such disparaging terms of the Fathers of the Christian Church, and of the Reformation, respectively, on the same ground of disapprobation. These gentlemen attack our ecclesiastical constitution from a few general heads of declamation and invective, without pointing directly to exceptionable particulars; at least to that particular which, as hath been before intimated, seems to be with *them* most exceptionable. I need not tell my reader, I mean the Doctrine of the Trinity, which the several venerable personages above mentioned assert and maintain in the fullest terms, and in the most plain and simple language. This is confessedly the fundamental Doctrine of the Church; and it had been both natural and prudent in these authors, had they believed it, to have excepted it in the strongest manner from their quarrel with our establishments. We are under no necessity to vindicate the Fathers of the Christian Church at all events, and with respect to all points and particulars. It will be sufficient to observe, that the sense of antiquity in regard to pure Scriptural doctrine, though not sacred, ought to have great weight with us; that if the Apostles are the *most* antient Fathers, and the times in which they wrote the *most* primitive (as the *Confessionalist* facetiously gives us to understand); their more immediate successors, and the times more immediately following, were as like to be enlightened as any set of men or period of time since; and that *Ignatius*, *Justin Martyr*, *Origen*, *Irenæus*, &c. (whom, by the way, our author *might* have mentioned in his 23d page, as well as *Chrysostom*, *Austin*, and *Jerome*) must in common reason and candour be supposed to have been as competent judges of, and as honest enquirers into, the apostolical writings

as are of *any* persuasion at all. For, I doubt, few of them consider, (if indeed they know) the difference between *that* and the persuasion of the *Calvinists*."---Thus we see, this writer pays as little compliment here to our understandings, as he hath done elsewhere to our integrity.---In one place he regards our spiritual governors in the disparaging light of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, whom he takes occasion

ings, as *Arius*, *Socinus*, or any of their followers and abettors in this or any other age or nation.---After all, the authority of Scripture is the avowed foundation of the doctrine of the Church of *England*; and that of the Fathers, so far only as agreeable to, and coinciding with it. --- The author of the *Confessional* admits, that when our first Reformers established confessions of faith, &c. they had the sanction " of the early practice of the Christian Church, long before the tyrannical spirit of *Rome* prevailed." And is not this circumstance in a manner decisive in their favour? --- No. For we are told, " their veneration for antiquity prevented their seeing that these very precedents were some of the steps by which the papal power ascended to it's height, and arrived at the plenitude of it's usurpation." And what if they were? Is it reasonable to argue against the use, propriety, or expedience of confessions and establishments, from certain acknowledged instances of their abuse and perversion? Or, circumstanced as our first Reformers were, could they have acted with more prudence, or piety, than they did, when by reducing our ecclesiastical constitution, as near as might be, to the primitive standard, they absolutely and effectually precluded all pretences to spiritual encroachments and usurpations, in matters of faith and conscience, for the time to come?

to call the "*great Churchmen of their times.*" In a second, he represents all the firm friends of, and advocates for ecclesiastical establishments as "*unreasonable zealots;*" and in a third, vilifies the compilers of religious articles and formularies in general with the contemptuous appellation of "*Confessionists and Creed-makers.*" In short, he spares neither rank nor character. Thus he styles some of the most eminent writers of our Church "a set of party-colour'd casuists;" and mentions the prelates of a certain period in the last century under the ignominious term of a *Crew*.---And does this man complain of *unreasonable zeal*, and the *bigotry of High-churchmen*?---To sum up all under this article in a few words---There is no such thing as holding the received doctrines of the Church, without incurring the displeasure, or rather spite of this author, who hath laboured to bring the very name and notion of orthodoxy into the lowest disrepute.---He never uses the word---*orthodox*---but with a sneer. "It is a very possible case, says he, that such a one (meaning such a one whom he had just called a *good and conscientious Christian*) may be a more edifying teacher, with respect to those points which are of the utmost importance, &c. than he who is warmed with the most sublime spirit of orthodoxy." --- Upon another occasion he expresses himself as follows.

lows. --- " Here, methinks, I perceive a fly orthodox brother, who has all this while hung his ears in a corner, begin now to prick them up, and come forward with this expostulation, &c."

I CANNOT think such usage as this could be justified, though our Church were fairly proved to be a mere sink of spiritual error and corruption: Indeed, as the *Confessionalist* has represented matters, one would think there can scarcely be any such thing as " a good and conscientious Christian within our Communion ; or a *serious, conscientious, and useful* Minister, who is *easy under the burden of subscription*. But, I hope, it hath competently been made to appear, that instead of evincing this point, he hath begged the question.

UPON the whole, I would just observe in conclusion, that the author of the *Confessional* could never have been more destitute of pretensions for his undertaking than at present. The Clergy of the establishment in general, I will be bold to affirm, never gave less offence by principle, by doctrine, or by conversation. The Spirit of persecution is not so properly dormant, as extinct. They *instruct those that oppose themselves in meekness* ; they *speak forth the words of truth and soberness* ; and shew men
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the way of salvation in the plainest and most familiar manner. Whatever they subscribe, or however they may differ with regard to a very few points of theological speculation, and those by no means fundamental, they do not disturb the minds, or perplex the consciences of their respective congregations with *these things*. Nay, was that *diversity of opinion* among us which the *Confessionalist* is so industrious to exaggerate, more considerable than it is, it would be at worst a business merely personal, not affecting the public peace of the Church, or the faith and practice of private Christians ^h. And is this state of things like

^h The state of the case being unquestionably such as hath here been represented, how durst the author of the *Confessional* cast the following opprobrious citation in our teeth, in the advertisement previous to the third edition of his performance? "Popery, says he, as a celebrated writer has observed, is but the consummation of that tyranny, which every religious system in the hands of men is in pursuit of, and whose principles they are all ready to adopt, whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with it's success." We have indeed the comfort of being involved by this peremptory declaration in one common censure with every spiritual establishment since the foundation of Christianity. For our author's argument *supposes* every ecclesiastical establishment to be tyrannical *as such*; or else he must necessarily admit the possibility of a religious system, agreeable to the Word of God, as well *since* as *before* the date of papal usurpation. But this, I trust, appears to be a romantic supposition; and therefore the *Confessionalist* must
excuse

to be productive of any inconveniences which *his comprehensive* plan is calculated to obviate or remove? Or can the admission of men of all denominations, persuasions and tenets, into the Ministry, be possibly attended with events favourable to *Church, State, or Christianity*ⁱ? Let those whose judgments and

excuse us, if we cannot regard religious systems and establishments antecedent to popery, or framed in direct opposition to popery, precisely in the same light with popery itself. Nay, this very quotation will not permit us to do so; because, if it speaks intelligible language, (which, by the way, is as much as it does) the most violent and arbitrary acts or constitutions, &c. of such religious establishments that can be imagined, are at worst but so many *steps* or *advances towards* that tyranny of which popery is the *consummation*.---Are then these steps and advances defensible?---By no means. But can there be *no* power or jurisdiction without *any degree* of tyranny? Or, ought all authority to be abolished because it is liable to be abused? Or, because authority is liable to be abused, are we immediately to conclude, that every man is bound, in the strictest sense, so to think and judge for himself in matters of religion, as to exclude the interference of all spiritual government.---In a word, what pretence or colour is there for reproaches and criminations of *this* sort at *this* day? Is it fair or reasonable to argue against *our* establishment from what *has* been, or *may* be practised under *any* establishment?

ⁱ The Church of *England* hath as a Church, or established society, been heretofore, and, I presume, justly, looked upon to be the principal bulwark of the Protestant Religion, against the open attacks and secret machinations of the Church of *Rome*. It hath, accordingly, been ever the policy

consciences answer this question in the negative, exert their best endeavours, in this *day of rebuke and blasphemy*, for the defence and support of *all three*; let Clergy and Laity in

licy of that Church to cherish and foment the divisions unhappily subsisting among us; and to effect, if possible, the very point so indefatigably aimed at by the *Confessional*; viz. the dissolution of our spiritual establishment. I have no manner of doubt but her emissaries will, to their uttermost, countenance and encourage this latitudinarian undertaking. For the Protestant Religion, if professed by individuals, agreeably to *it's* plan, would afford matter not of grief or terror, but of scoff and derision to the enemy; because men of *all sorts* affect to be included in the general denomination of *Protestant*; and, in truth, none so absolutely and effectually renounce all imaginable errors of the Church of *Rome*, or remove to so great a distance from her Communion, as atheists themselves. In short, the advantages that might be taken of Protestant disunion by the common adversary, are too obvious to be enlarged upon.--I shall therefore leave it to experience to confute the notion of a "certain masterly (though anonymous author)" from whom the author of *Free Thoughts*, &c. hath made large extracts, who tells us, "he is persuaded that a general and strict adherence to this truly Protestant principle, (the exercise of private judgment, he means, and the right which every man has to the free use of the Holy Scriptures, in the sense which his hypothesis requires) had we room to hope for it, would tend more than any thing else to sap the foundations, and shake the whole system of popery."---But I cannot dismiss "this able and engaging writer" without taking notice of another extraordinary sentiment of his in relation to Christian unity. "Herein it is (says he) that true *Christian unity* does consist: not so much in uniformity of opinion, as in unanimity of affection, in love and peace, in mutual charity and good will

their several spheres and capacities *be zealously affected in this good thing* ; let this zeal be *according to knowledge*, and according to virtue and charity ; and then let all with an holy

will, and in all kind and friendly offices, as it becometh brethren in *Christ Jesus* ; who all hold the same head, and acknowledge one and the same Lord, and who are (as to every thing material or necessary) of the same mind and judgment (and of the same universal Church of Christ) however denominated or distinguished in other respects."--Now the first part of this paragraph, we see, scarcely admits *uniformity of opinion* to have any thing to do with *Christian unity*. Those *grudging* words---*not so much*---have an exclusive tendency. But is this a fair and just representation ?---Surely uniformity of opinion is not barely consistent with, but naturally productive of Christian unity, unanimity of affection, love, peace, and mutual charity, &c. Doth any thing connect men so strongly as the same persuasion and the same interest ? And if not, are not the above sentences a downright insult upon the common sense of every reader ?----Again.---It seems, upon the plan of this "ingenious essayist," all Christians are to be considered as "brethren in Christ Jesus ; who all hold the same head, and acknowledge one and the same Lord, and who are (as to every thing material or necessary) of the same mind and judgment, (and of the same universal Church of Christ) however denominated or distinguished in other respects." But, I desire to ask this gentleman, or his admirer who cites him, whether among those who *profess and call themselves Christians*, we shall not find infidels of every denomination, and heretics, and sectaries, that hold the most detestable and ridiculous tenets ?---And can these, or any of these, be truly and properly said to be *brethren in Christ Jesus*, to hold the same head, to be (as to every thing material or necessary) of the same mind, &c. and of the same universal Church ? &c.---Granting therefore, that we

assurance unite in their supplications to the Almighty, " that the course of this world
 " may be peaceably ordered by his governance;

we may and ought to be in perfect charity even with the most abominable of all these, yet, I suppose, neither the essayist nor his citer would be willing they should be admitted into the society, and much less the Ministry of the Church. But can this possibly be prevented consistently with the latitudinarian maxim, and the dissolution of systems and establishments?—Yes, it may—say both the author of *Free Thoughts*, &c. and the *Confessionalist*; the former of whom hath accordingly submitted to consideration two forms, containing each a declaration to be substituted in the room of subscription to the articles; and the latter refers us to, and cites the substance of, the 2d, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th, of the eight questions put to every priest in the office of ordination, as containing " as ample security in this behalf, as any Church can desire, or can be authorized to demand."

To which I have to say in reply, that if the reader will turn to these answers, or to those forms of declaration, he will find them respectively expressed in terms too *general*, or too *equivocal*, for the purpose of a barrier or security against false and erroneous opinions: he will find a free passage left to infidels and heretics of almost all ranks and denominations; even to such as deny the fundamental doctrines, not of *this* or *that particular* Church, but of the Christian Church *universal* through all ages, *viz.* the Divinity of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;---the satisfaction of Christ;---the resurrection of the *body*; &c. &c. --- The authors I have been concerned with are in a manner silent upon these great articles; and, I presume, we are at full liberty to put our own interpretation upon that silence.---To conclude:---I am as much *for toleration* (in every sense compatible with the preservation of our ecclesiastical constitution;) and *against* " fines, imprisonments, and processions to *Smithfield*," as the
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“ that *his* Church may joyfully serve *him* in
 “ all godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our
 “ Lord.” *Amen.*

the *Confessionalist* himself can possibly be : --- I am sensible, and have acknowledged, (as who would not ?) that *some* alterations might be made for the better, in regard to the liturgy, the articles, and the rites and ceremonies of our Church : but as I would have these alterations made by competent ecclesiastical authority, so I could be glad to have them suggested from a proper quarter.---In short---under a specious pretence of encouraging *Reformation*, and asserting religious *Liberty*, I do not wish to see the very *foundations* of Christianity *destroyed*, or a *Babel* erected on the ruins of *Zion*.

F I N I S.

